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WASHINGTON, D.C. - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) today condemned the wave of attacks targeting Shi'a pilgrims traveling to Karbala, Iraq to commemorate Arbaeen, and called on the Iraqi government to increase security and bring the attackers to justice.

"I am alarmed by the recent series of deadly attacks targeting religious pilgrims," said [Leonard Leo](#), USCIRF chair. "These attacks seem intended to exacerbate sectarian tensions that are already heightened by the current political crisis, and risk a return to the sectarian violence that killed so many Iraqis, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, in 2006-07. The Iraqi government must act quickly and urgently to prevent this by tightening security on pilgrimage routes and in Karbala, investigating the attacks, and prosecuting the perpetrators."

Today, a roadside bomb south of Baghdad killed at least one pilgrim and wounded at least nine, and another roadside bomb near Hilla wounded 15. On Thursday, January 5, a suicide bomber exploded himself next to a group of pilgrims near Nasiriyah, killing at least 48 people and wounding more than 81; the same day, five other bombings targeted mainly Shi'a neighborhoods in Baghdad, killing 24 and injuring at least 65.

Arbaeen marks the end of the 40-day mourning period after the anniversary of the death of the Prophet Muhammed's grandson.

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF's principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

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